



Amoris Laetitia
The Joy of Love

Archdiocese of Los Angeles Reflection
and Study Guide Questions

Pope Francis
Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation
April 2016

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Amoris Laetitia (AL), “The Joy of Love,” the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation “on Love in the Family,” was signed on 19 March [2016], the Solemnity of Saint Joseph. It brings together the results of the two Synods on the family convoked by Pope Francis in 2014 and 2015. The Summary at the beginning of each chapter includes quotes from Vatican Radio – April, 8, 2016. The “Reflections and Study Questions” were created by Joan Vienna, Director of Family Life, with contributions by Tony Vienna (Chapters 1-9), Dr. Marcos Roman (Chapter 7), Candy Metoyer (Chapter 4), Julie Auzenne (Chapter 8), Annette Vichot (assistance) and Gerri Spray (proofing).

Introduction

Summary: The Apostolic Exhortation is striking for its breadth and detail. Its 325 paragraphs are distributed over nine chapters. The seven *introductory paragraphs* plainly set out the complexity of a topic in urgent need of thorough study. The interventions of the Synod Fathers make up [form] a “multifaceted gem” (AL 4), a precious polyhedron, whose value must be preserved. But the Pope cautions that “not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium.” Indeed, for some questions, “each country or region ... can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs. For ‘cultures are in fact quite diverse and every general principle... needs to be enculturated, if it is to be respected and applied’” (AL 3).

Chapter 1: In the Light of the Word

Summary: The Pope begins his reflections with the Holy Scriptures in the *first chapter*, which unfolds as a meditation on Psalm 128 (which appears in the Jewish wedding liturgy as well as that of Christian marriages). The Bible “is full of families, births, love stories and family crises” (AL 8). This impels us to meditate on how the family is not an abstract ideal but rather like a practical “trade” (AL 16), which is carried out with tenderness (AL 28), but which has also been confronted with sin from the beginning, when the relationship of love turned into domination (cf. AL 19). Hence, the Word of God “is not a series of abstract ideas but rather a source of comfort and companionship for every family that experiences difficulties or suffering. For it shows them the goal of their journey...” (AL 22).

Reflection One & Study Questions: *Through Scriptures that are shared in this chapter, we learn about the many role models of family and hear their stories of love, challenge and the power of their faith in God that is at the center of their journey.*

- Which of the Holy Scriptures in this chapter has special meaning for you? Why? (AL 8-13)
- If you are married, which Scripture passages did you use on your wedding day? Why?

Reflection Two and Study Questions: *Pope Francis states, “In this brief review, we can see that the word of God is not a series of abstract ideas but ... a source of comfort and companionship for every family that experiences difficulties and suffering” (AL22).*

- How have you and/or your family experienced suffering on your life’s journey?
- How has the word of God comforted you in those times?

Chapter 2: The Experiences and Challenges of Families

Summary: Building on the biblical base, in the *second chapter*, the Pope considers the current situation of families. While keeping “firmly grounded in [the] reality” of family experiences (AL 6), he also draws heavily on the final Reports of the two Synods. Families face many challenges, from migration to the ideological denial of differences between the sexes (“ideology of gender” AL 56); from the culture of the provisional to the antinatal mentality and the impact of biotechnology in the field of procreation; from the lack of housing and work to pornography and abuse of minors; from inattention to persons with disabilities, to lack of respect for the elderly; from the legal dismantling of the family, to violence against women. The Pope insists on concreteness, which is a key concept in the Exhortation. And it is concreteness, realism and daily life that make up the substantial difference between acceptable “theories” of interpretation of reality and arbitrary “ideologies.”

Reflection One & Study Questions. *The Pope issues an important challenge to modify how we advocate our Christian beliefs. We need to approach such matters in humble and realistic ways taking into account the realities we all live with. As an example, the Pope emphasizes that, for example, in the case of marriage preparation, we need to consider the way young couples think and their particular timetables. We also should not insist on only asserting the duty of procreation (AL 36). The Pope goes on to point out that we must also encourage openness to grace and not simply preach doctrine and moral view. “We have been called to form consciences, not replace them” (AL 37).*

- In what ways can we encourage young couples to have an openness to grace and to show them the benefit of living out our values and beliefs while being sensitive to their viewpoints and personal circumstances?
- Do you have any personal struggle with how the Pope calls us to “moderate” our preaching of values and beliefs in our ministries and to form not replace consciences?

Reflection Two and Study Questions: *The last two Synods pointed to the various symptoms of a “culture of the ephemeral” (AL 39). Some of the symptoms addressed are: love can connect and disconnect, fears associated with permanent commitment, obsession with free time, loneliness, everything is disposable and narcissism (AL 39).*

- Do you see any of the symptoms in your own life or that of your family and friends?
- In what ways have these symptoms affected your parish community?

Chapter 3: Looking to Jesus: The Vocation of the Family

Summary: The *third chapter* is dedicated to some essential elements of the Church's teaching on marriage and the family. This chapter is important because its 30 paragraphs concisely depict the vocation of the family according to the Gospel and as affirmed by the Church over time. Above all, it stresses the themes of indissolubility, the sacramental nature of marriage, the transmission of life and the education of children. *Gaudium et Spes* of Vatican II, *Humanae Vitae* of Paul VI, and *Familiaris Consortio* of John Paul II are widely quoted. The chapter provides a broad view and touches on "imperfect situations" as well. "The degree of responsibility is not equal in all cases and factors may exist which limit the ability to make a decision. Therefore, while clearly stating the Church's teaching, pastors are to avoid judgements that do not take into account the complexity of various situations, and they are to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience and endure distress because of their condition" (AL 79).

Reflection One & Study Questions: *Chapter 3 (AL 71-75) emphasizes the centrality of the Sacrament of Matrimony in the family. "The sacrament is the gift given for the sanctification and salvation of the spouses," but, beyond that, it is also a sign of the Holy Trinity and God's love for the Church. Accordingly, Matrimony is not a mere ritual, social convention or the outward sign of a commitment. It is a calling, a vocation (AL 72).*

- In what ways do married couples live out their lives differently, know that the Sacrament of Matrimony is a calling to a vocation?
- In what ways can we, as a community, seek God's grace as we face the challenges to nurture Christian family life?

Reflection Two & Study Questions: *The word "domestic church" is mentioned 11 times in Amoris Laetitia, including in the Closing Prayer to the Holy Family. In chapter three he states: "Within the family 'which could be called a domestic church' (Lumen Gentium, 11), individuals enter upon an ecclesial experience of communion among persons, which reflects, through grace, the mystery of the Holy Spirit" (AL 86); and "The Church is a family of families, constantly enriched by the lives of all those domestic churches" (AL 87).*

- Do you consider your family a "domestic church" that reflects the mystery of the Holy Spirit?
- In what ways do you see the families of your parish enriching one another by their lives as "domestic church"?

Chapter 4: Love in Marriage

Summary: The *fourth chapter* treats love in marriage, which it illuminates with Saint Paul's *Hymn to Love* in *1 Corinthians* 13:4-7. This opening section is truly a painstaking, focused, inspired and poetic exegesis of the Pauline text. It is a collection of brief passages carefully and tenderly describing human love in absolutely concrete terms. The quality of psychological introspection that marks this exegesis is striking. The psychological insights enter into the emotional world of the spouses – positive and negative – and the erotic dimension of love. This is an extremely rich and valuable contribution to Christian married life, unprecedented in previous papal documents. The chapter concludes with a very important reflection on the “transformation of love” because “Longer lifespans now mean that close and exclusive relationships must last for four, five or even six decades; consequently, the initial decision has to be frequently renewed” (AL 163). As physical appearance alters, the loving attraction does not lessen but changes as sexual desire can be transformed over time into the desire for togetherness and mutuality: “There is no guarantee that we will feel the same way all through life” (AL 163).

Reflection One & Study Question: *Pope Francis uses the words of St. Paul (1 Cor. 13:4-7) to teach how married couples honor the call to service through the Sacrament of Matrimony (AL 90-118).*

- Give three examples of ways married couples can look at St. Paul's words to honor this call to serve in the Sacrament of Matrimony.

Reflection Two & Study Question: *The call to marriage is a full commitment that God has designed for us. Pope Francis is very clear that we are human and cannot expect to be perfect or be loved perfectly.*

- With this in mind, what does He say about our inevitable human failures within the course of our marriage, and how are we to work with these in regard to ourselves and our spouse?

Reflection Three & Study Questions: *Pope Francis' recurring message is quoted twice in *Amoris Laetitia* (AL 133) and (AL 266), thus immortalizing his words. In chapter four he states once again that “The love of friendship unifies all aspects of marital life and helps family members to grow constantly. This love must be freely and generously expressed in words and acts. In the family, ‘three words need to be used. I want to repeat this! Three words: **Please, Thank you, Sorry.** Three essential words!’” (AL 133).*

- Do you agree with the Pope about the importance of these three simple words?
- Do you make a habit of living the message of “Please, Thank you and Sorry” in your own life?

Reflection Three & Study Questions: *In speaking to those Catholic in a single vocation, Pope Francis states, “Many people who are unmarried are not only devoted to their own family but often render greater service into their group of friends, in the church community and in in their professional lives” (AL 158). He goes on to say, “Their dedication greatly enriches the family, the Church and society” (AL 158).*

- What could the Church do to acknowledge, celebrate and affirm you in your single vocation?
- Do you agree that the single vocation is more than simply being “unmarried”?

Chapter 5: Love Made Fruitful

Summary: The *fifth chapter* is entirely focused on love's fruitfulness and procreation. It speaks in a profoundly spiritual and psychological manner about welcoming new life, about the waiting period of pregnancy, about the love of a mother and a father. It also speaks of the expanded fruitfulness of adoption, of welcoming the contribution of families to promote a "culture of encounter," and of family life in a broad sense which includes aunts and uncles, cousins, relatives of relatives, friends.

Reflection One & Study Questions: *Chapter 9 provides extensive details regarding the ways that conjugal love and family life can expand its fruitfulness in the immediate as well as the extended family and into the community. It deals with welcoming new life, parenting, the roles of sons and daughters and reaching out to the wider family such as brothers and sisters, grandparents and other elderly family members, in-laws and other relatives, as well as out into the broader community of friends and neighbors.*

- What are the ways that your family nurtures the fruitfulness of love within your immediate family and what are the results of those efforts?
- What role does your nuclear family play in your wider family and what activities do you engage in as outreach to the community?

Reflection Two & Study Questions: *Psalm 71:9 says "Do not cast me off in the time of my old age; forsake me not when my strength is spent." Pope Francis states "This is the plea of the elderly, who fear being forgotten or rejected...We must reawaken the collective sense of gratitude, of appreciation, of hospitality, which makes the elderly feel like a living part of the community" (AL 191).*

- Do you have elderly person in your family or community who fears being forgotten or rejected?
- What have you done to show them your gratitude, appreciation and hospitality?
- Does your parish have specific ministries that help the elderly to be a living part of the community?

Chapter 6: Some Pastoral Perspectives

Summary: In the *sixth chapter*, the Pope treats various pastoral perspectives that are aimed at forming solid and fruitful families according to God's plan.

Reflection One and Study Questions: *Pope Francis reflects the great concern of the Synod Fathers when he says, "we need to help young people to discover the dignity and beauty of marriage." Chapter 6 (AL 200-240) is dedicated to stressing importance of marriage preparation and pastoral care for the engaged in the view of the challenges facing married couples today. Pope Francis stresses that "Both short-term and long-term marriage preparation should ensure that the couple do not view the wedding ceremony as the end of the road, but instead embark upon marriage as a lifelong calling based on a firm and realistic decision to face all trials and difficult moments together. The pastoral care of engaged and married couples should be centered on the marriage bond, assisting couples not only to deepen their love but also to overcome problems and difficulties" (AL 211).*

- What does Pope Francis mean when he speaks of "long-term" marriage preparation and its importance in the lives of young people today?
- On a scale of 1 – 10, what priority does your parish make the pastoral care and support to engaged couples who are preparing for marriage [1 being top priority and 10 being least]?

Reflection Two and Study Questions: *In the last part of Chapter 6, Pope Francis reflects on some significant pastoral challenges of marriage and family life today and suggests new pastoral methods for consideration. Challenges today: injustice, abuse and violence (AL 241); separated, divorced and abandoned (AL 242); divorced and a new union (AL 243); cases of nullity (AL 244); children of separated and divorced (AL 245 and 246); issues involving mixed marriages (AL 247); disparity of cult/interreligious marriages; (AL 248); families whose members include persons who experience same-sex attraction (AL 250); single parents (AL 252); grieving families (AL 253); loss of a loved one (AL 254); grieving and death (AL 255 to 258).*

- Which of these challenges has touched your life and/or the life of your family?
- What "new pastoral methods" has your parish devised to be more practical and effective in addressing these issues?
- Do you consider yourself an "active agent" in the evangelization and catechesis in your own family and your parish family?

Chapter 7: Towards a Better Education of Children

Summary: The *seventh chapter* is dedicated to the education of children: their ethical formation, the learning of discipline which can include punishment, patient realism, sex education, passing on the faith and, more generally, family life as an educational context. The practical wisdom present in each paragraph is remarkable, above all the attention given to those gradual, small steps “that can be understood, accepted and appreciated” (AL 271).

Reflection One & Study Questions: *Pope Francis states that “Parents need to consider what they want their child to be exposed to, and this necessarily means being concerned about who is providing their entertainment, who is entering their rooms through television and electronic devices, and with whom they are spending their free time” (AL 260).*

- Do you agree with the Pope’s concerns that children are exposed through entertainment, television, ads, electronic devices etc.?
- What has your parish/school done to help parents reflect on this important area of concern?

Reflection Two & Study Questions: *In the subsection entitled, “The Need for Sex Education” (AL 280-286), Pope Francis raises several important pastoral questions regarding the moral formation of our young people. He concludes by stating: “Where sex education is concerned, much is at stake.”*

- What are the issues the Holy Father is raising?
- How have we been effective in Catholic schools and parishes in forming our young people in the virtue and vocation of chastity?
- What does the Holy Father suggest might increase our effectiveness in the moral formation of our young people?

Reflection Three & Study Questions: *Pope Francis states that “Handing on the faith presumes that parents themselves genuinely trust God, seek him and sense their need for him, for only in this way does ‘one generation laud your works to another, and declare your mighty acts’ (Ps 144:4) and ‘fathers make known to children your faithfulness’ (Is 38:19)” (AL 287).*

- Discuss the pastoral challenges in engaging parents in the formation of their children?
- How have we stressed in our schools and parishes the primacy of parents as the first educators of their children?
- What pastoral approaches might enhance or increase the role of parents in the formation of their children?
- What suggestions does the Holy Father offer in challenging and supporting the educational vocation of parents?

Chapter 8: Accompanying, Discerning and Integrating Weakness

Summary: The *eighth chapter* is an invitation to mercy and pastoral discernment in situations that do not fully match what the Lord proposes. The Pope uses three very important verbs: *guiding*, *discerning* and *integrating*, which are fundamental in addressing fragile, complex or irregular situations. The chapter has sections on the need for gradualness in pastoral care; the importance of discernment; norms and mitigating circumstances in pastoral discernment; and finally what the Pope calls the “logic of pastoral mercy.” As far as discernment with regard to “irregular” situations is concerned, the Pope states: “There is a need ‘to avoid judgements which do not take into account the complexity of various situations’ and ‘to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience distress because of their condition’” (AL 296).

Reflection One & Study Question: *Saint John Paul II proposed the so-called “law of gradualness” in the knowledge that the human being “knows, loves and accomplishes moral good by different stages of growth” (AL 295). He tells us the law is itself a gift of God which points out the way, a gift for everyone without exception; it can be followed with the help of grace, even though each human being “advances gradually with the progressive integration of the gifts of God and the demands of God’s definitive and absolute love in his or her entire person” (AL 295).*

- How has the “law of gradualness” been a part of the stages of your faith journey?

Reflection Two & Study Questions: *Pope Francis calls for “The baptized who are divorced and civilly remarried need to be more fully integrated into Christian communities in the variety of ways possible, while avoiding any occasion of scandal. The logic of integration is the key to their pastoral care, a care which would allow them not only to realize that they belong to the Church as the Body of Christ, but also to know that they can have a joyful and fruitful experience of it” (AL 299).*

- Have you experienced a separation or divorce in your own family?
- How does your parish community journey with Catholics experiencing separation, divorce and remarried so that they will know that they have not been abandon by the Church?

Chapter 9: The Spirituality of Marriage and the Family

Summary: The *ninth chapter* is devoted to marital and family spirituality, which “is made up of thousands of small but real gestures” (AL 315). The Pope clearly states that “those who have deep spiritual aspirations should not feel that the family detracts from their growth in the life of the Spirit, but rather see it as a path which the Lord is using to lead them to the heights of mystical union” (AL 316). In the final paragraph, the Pope affirms “no family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love.... All of us are called to keep striving towards something greater than ourselves and our families, and every family must feel this constant impulse. Let us make this journey as families, let us keep walking together.... May we never lose heart because of our limitations, or ever stop seeking that fullness of love and communion which God holds out before us” (AL 325).

Reflection One & Study Question: *This chapter focuses on the meaning and sources of family spirituality. Family life is described not as a distraction to spiritual growth but as the path to that objective – “spirituality becomes incarnate in the communion of the family” (AL 316).*

- In what ways can we maintain our focus on the ongoing growth of spirituality in our families?
- How can we maintain our focus on the dignity and needs of our family members?

Reflection Two & Study Questions: *Pope Francis closes Amoris Laetitia with the call, “Let us make the journey as families, let us keep walking together. What we have been promised is greater than we can imagine. May we never lose heart because of our limitations, or every stop seeking the fullness of love and communion which God holds out before us” (AL 325).*

- How has *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love) inspired you to live your journey of faith more deeply within your own life, family, parish and world?
- As you continue to reflect on *Amoris Laetitia* and its meaning in your life, pray the Closing Prayer to the Holy Family asking for God’s wisdom, guidance and strength!

Prayer to the Holy Family

“Let us make this journey as families, let us keep walking together. What we have been promised is greater than we can imagine. May we never lose heart because of our limitations, or ever stop seeking that fullness of love and communion which God holds out before us.”

~ Pope Francis, Amoris Laetitia (The Joy of Love) (325)

*Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
in you we contemplate
the splendor of true love;
to you we turn with trust.*

*Holy Family of Nazareth,
grant that our families too
may be places of communion and prayer,
authentic schools of the Gospel
and small domestic churches.*

*Holy Family of Nazareth,
may families never again experience
violence, rejection and division;
may all who have been hurt or scandalized
find ready comfort and healing.*

*Holy Family of Nazareth,
make us once more mindful
of the sacredness and inviolability of the family,
and its beauty in God's plan.*

*Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
Graciously hear our prayer. Amen.*